

The Need for Paid Parental Leave for Federal Employees: **Adapting to a Changing Workforce**

Kevin Miller, Ph.D., Allison Suppan Helmuth, and Robin Farabee-Siers



Institute for Women's Policy Research

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Institute for Women's Policy Research

1707 L Street NW, Suite 750

Washington, DC 20036

Phone: (202) 785 5100

Fax: (202) 833 4362

www.iwpr.org

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Executive Summary

Facing Workforce Challenges

The federal government, unlike many large private employers, does not provide paid parental leave to its employees. The federal government is the largest single employer in the United States, but federal employees are significantly older and better educated than private sector workers and have already begun retiring at an increasing rate. The departure of many baby boomers from the federal workforce will require the government to recruit and retain younger workers, who expect more job flexibility than workers from previous generations.

The Federal Employees Paid Parental Leave Act would provide four weeks of paid leave for federal workers who adopt, foster, or have a child. This report discusses the role that providing paid parental leave to federal employees could play in addressing federal workforce challenges. Providing paid parental leave for federal workers is expected to improve recruitment and retention of young workers, preventing \$50 million per year in costs associated with employee turnover.

Recruiting Young Workers

- ▶ Employers increasingly recognize that young workers place a priority on finding jobs that accommodate their family and personal lives.
- ▶ Two-thirds of college students say that balancing work and family is a priority for them.
- ▶ Work-family balance is valued by both men and women, especially those with children.
- ▶ Younger workers increasingly make up a larger proportion of the workforce.
- ▶ Companies attract a broad range of workers by providing benefits that meet the needs of younger workers with families.

Competing with the Private Sector

- ▶ Overall, federal employees are less satisfied with their jobs and employers than are employees of private companies, and federal sick and vacation benefits are not substantially greater than those offered at large corporate employers.
- ▶ Paid parental leave is part of strategy employed by many companies to improve recruitment and retention of employees.
- ▶ About three-quarters of the Fortune 100 offer maternity leave (median amount of six to eight weeks) and a third of Fortune 100 companies offer paid paternity leave.
- ▶ *Working Mother* magazine's 100 best companies for working mothers all offer paid maternity leave and most offer other workplace flexibility benefits such as telecommuting, flextime, and part-time phase-back scheduling.
- ▶ Three-fourths of the companies on the *Working Mother* list also provide paid leave for new fathers.

Addressing a Gap in Benefits

- ▶ Federal employee satisfaction with work-life benefits averages 43%, compared to 86% satisfaction with vacation and sick time; younger workers are less satisfied than older workers with the paid leave they receive.
- ▶ Workers newer to federal service need more than four years of service to accrue enough sick leave to take twelve weeks of parental leave with pay.
- ▶ Complications from pregnancy and childbirth can deplete accrued sick leave, requiring new parents to take unpaid leave.
- ▶ High-quality, affordable child care for infants is very difficult to find, and having a child is estimated to cost families \$11,000 in a child's first year of life alone.

Keeping Parents in the Workforce

- ▶ New mothers who are able to take leave are more likely than those without leave to return to work within three months of giving birth.
- ▶ Women with paid parental leave are more likely to return to the same employer after the birth of a child.
- ▶ When Aetna increased the length of its maternity leave, retention of new mothers increased from 77% to 91%.
- ▶ Workplace flexibility improves workers' commitment to their employer, and work-life balance is a leading concern cited by employees deciding to remain with their employer.

Reducing the Costs of Turnover

- ▶ Improved employee retention would yield significant savings for the federal government.
- ▶ The costs of turnover result from recruiting new employees, the low productivity of new workers, drains on the productivity of colleagues and supervisors, human resources processing, training, and the productivity lost between the departure of an employee and the hiring of a replacement.
- ▶ OPM data show that in 2008, women of childbearing age were 31% more likely to quit federal employment than were men of the same age.
- ▶ IWPR calculates that the federal government could prevent 2,650 departures per year among female employees by offering paid parental leave, preventing \$50 million per year in turnover costs.

Introduction

In many regards, the federal government is viewed as exemplary in its provision of employee benefits. When it comes to parental leave, however, it lags behind the private sector—the federal government provides no paid parental leave to its workers. The Federal Employees Paid Parental Leave Act (FEPPLA, H.R. 626/S. 354), introduced by Representative Carolyn Maloney and Senator Jim Webb in early 2009, would provide four weeks of paid leave for use after the birth, adoption, or fostering of a child to most employees of Congress and federal agencies who are already eligible to take unpaid parental leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA).¹ Members of the armed forces would not be covered, but already receive six weeks of paid parental leave.

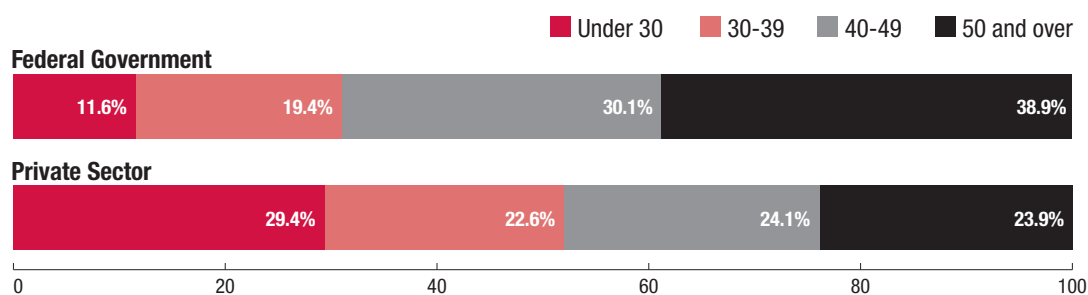
In the coming years, the federal government will face unprecedented challenges in maintaining its highly skilled workforce. In 2008, the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) predicted that 36 percent of the federal workforce employed as of 2006—more than 566,000 workers—would be eligible for retirement by 2010 (U.S. Office of Personnel Management 2008a). Younger workers demand greater work-life flexibility, and while many private sector companies are leading the way with paid parental leave packages, the current federal benefits do not meet younger workers' needs. The Federal Employee Paid Parental Leave Act of 2009 would enable the government to improve employee health and morale, reduce the cost of employee turnover, and recruit and maintain a highly skilled workforce.

The U.S. Government Faces Unprecedented Challenges in Maintaining its Highly Skilled Workforce

The civilian federal government employs more workers—almost 2 million who would be eligible for benefits under FEPPLA—than any other employer in the United States (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2008). In 2008, the U.S. Office of Personnel Management estimated that of the employees in the federal workforce as of 2006, more than 566,000 will be eligible for retirement by 2010 and nearly one million will be eligible for retirement by 2016. Between 2006 and 2016, more than 586,000 federal employees will have retired (U.S. Office of Personnel Management 2008a). The retirement of baby boomers will impact the federal government more heavily than it will impact the private sector due to the greater proportion of employees over age 45 employed in the federal government (58 percent versus 41 percent in the private sector) (Partnership for Public Service 2008). As Table 1 shows, more than two-thirds of federal employees are older than 40 and almost 40 percent are older than 50.

These upcoming retirements present a challenge for re-staffing many positions in the federal workforce, but will cause a substantial drain on supervisory workers in particular, 58 percent of whom will be eligible for retirement by 2011, compared with 42 percent of non-supervisory personnel (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2009). The rate of retirement in the federal workforce has been increasing for some time. Between 2002 and 2006, the annual rate of departing employees increased by 34 percent and voluntary retirement of full-time employees increased by almost 50 percent (Partnership for Public Service 2008).

Figure 1. Federal Government Workers Are Older than Private Sector Workers



Source: Partial reproduction of "Figure 2: Educational Attainment of Workers in Private and Government Sector, 2006" in Stuart Greenfield's *Public Sector Employment: The Current Situation*; used with permission (Greenfield 2007).

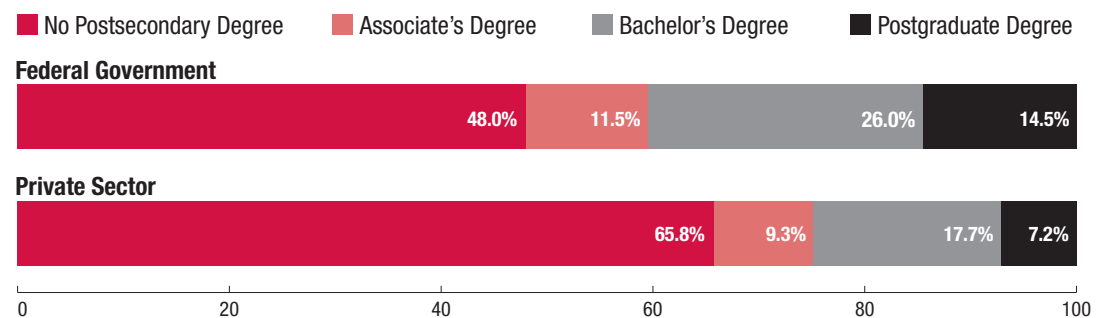
¹ In order to be eligible for benefits under FEPPLA, employees must have been a federal employee for at least a year. District of Columbia employees, workers who work less than 1,250 hours a year, postal workers, employees of the Federal Aviation Administration, and some others are not eligible for benefits under FEPPLA.

This exodus of baby boomer workers will create an unprecedented recruitment challenge that may be difficult for the federal government to meet. According to a 2003 General Accounting Office report, it takes more than three months, on average, to fill a competitive federal position, and by the time an agency responds to applications, as few as 1 in 20 applicants are still interested in a position (General Accounting Office 2003). One survey found that more than two-thirds of college students said they would not wait more than one month to receive a job offer from the federal government (Partnership for Public Service 2005). Max Stier (2007), an expert on federal employment and the President and CEO of the Partnership for Public Service, has noted that the government is not well connected with private-sector job seekers and tends to recruit from within, making it more difficult to recruit new workers or replace workers who have left the federal workforce.

The federal government's recruitment task is made more difficult by the high average skill level of the federal workforce. Table 2 shows the percentage of employees with post-secondary education in the private and public sectors. Forty percent of federal employees have at least a bachelor's degree, compared with only 25 percent of private sector workers.

Federal employment is strongly slanted toward professional occupations—66 percent of employees are in management, business, financial, or professional occupations, compared with 30 percent of private-sector workers—and the share of professional employment in the federal government is projected to increase (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2009). Most of the 273,000 new hires that it is estimated the federal government will need to hire between 2009 and 2012 will be in the fields of medicine and public health; law; program management and administration; compliance and enforcement; and security and protection (Partnership for Public Service 2009). The Partnership for Public Service (2006) reports that “all sectors of the American economy are increasingly competing with each other for pools of talent that will not grow substantially in size for the foreseeable future” (7). Despite the current recession, which has created a surplus of workers at most skill levels, analyses have concluded that demographic trends will continue to create more demand for skilled workers without a corresponding increase in supply (Aspen Institute 2002; Holzer and Lerman 2009).

Figure 2. Federal Government Workers Are More Highly Educated than Private Sector Workers



Source: Partial reproduction of “Figure 2: Educational Attainment of Workers in Private and Government Sector, 2006” in Stuart Greenfield’s *Public Sector Employment: The Current Situation*; used with permission (Greenfield 2007).

Younger Workers Demand Greater Work-Life Flexibility

Using comprehensive benefits packages to attract top talent is likely to appeal to younger workers who will dominate the workforce in the coming years. While federal government employment has traditionally been viewed as very secure and that reliability has been very important to older generations of workers, younger workers have other priorities and values in addition to job security that they value in the workplace (Smola and Sutton 2002). Surveys have shown that people of all generations, but especially the youngest workers, are far less likely to endorse traditional gender roles relating to work and family responsibilities. Men in particular are now substantially more likely to be concerned with balancing work and family concerns than they once were (Galinsky, Aumann, and Bond 2009). James Craft, Professor of Business Administration at the University of Pittsburgh, has noted that employers are

increasingly aware of this generational shift in priorities and use flexible scheduling to attract younger workers (Aratani 2008).

Approximately two-thirds (63 percent) of college students find the opportunity to balance work and family to be an attractive aspect of federal employment. It is even more compelling for Hispanic and African-American students (69 and 68 percent, respectively; Partnership for Public Service 2006). Furthermore, both women and men value work-life balance. A study of over 400 working fathers found that 73 percent would be stay-at-home parents if it were financially feasible and less than half think their employers allow working fathers to balance work and family adequately. The study also found that more than 85 percent of fathers view prospective employers more positively if they offer paternity leave (Esola 2008).

The demand for workplace policies that allow workers to balance career and family is likely to increase as younger workers become a larger share of the total workforce. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2004) estimates that there will be a nine percent increase in the number of workers under age 24 by 2012, while the proportion of the workforce in the age category of 35 to 44 will decrease by four percent, making younger workers a more dominant workforce group.

In addition, women, who still bear the majority of caregiving responsibilities in families, are likely to make up a greater share of the highly skilled workforce as time goes on. Women already make up an increasing majority of those receiving bachelor's and master's degrees and they are expected to begin receiving the majority of doctoral and professional degrees within the next few years (U.S. Department of Education 2008). Along with the rapid retirement of baby boomers and the trend for younger men to value work-family balance more highly, these changes will make finding and retaining qualified workers a significant challenge for employers who lack competitive work-life policies.

Offering a more flexible workplace and comprehensive benefits package may be the key to recruiting and retaining these younger workers. Melissa Proffitt Reese, Linda Rowings, and Tiffany Sharpley (2007) write in *Employee Benefit Plan Review* that "organizations should no longer rely on the traditional benefit plan structures and features. To be competitive and attract the best and brightest workforce, employers must create innovative benefit packages that appeal to a broad range of workers" (25). Offering paid parental leave would move the federal government in the direction of comprehensive work-life benefits that would attract younger, more family-oriented workers.

Private-Sector Benefits Increasingly Match or Exceed Federal Benefits

Better work-life policies would increase employee satisfaction not only among younger federal workers, but across the age spectrum. Results from the 2008 Federal Human Capital Survey reveal that federal workers overall are unsatisfied with the work-life benefits offered by their employers. While employees' satisfaction with benefits like health insurance and vacation time has increased or stayed the same since 2004, the percentage of federal employees who are satisfied with the work-life benefits offered by their employers is notably low—satisfaction with federal work-life programs has decreased by 6 percentage points in the last five years, and overall, private-sector workers are more satisfied with their employers than are federal employees (U.S. Office of Personnel Management 2008b).

Government employees receive health, retirement, and other benefits that are comparable to those received by the employees of most large companies. Like the staff of other large employers, federal workers with one year of employment tenure are allowed up to 12 weeks annually of job-protected, unpaid leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act (Department of Labor 2009). Federal workers also receive paid annual (vacation) leave at a rate of 13 days per year for those with fewer than three years of employment tenure, 20 days for those with at least three but less than 15 years, and 26 days a year for those with 15 or more years. Federal workers receive 13 paid sick days per year (U.S. Office of Personnel Management 2009a).

These federal benefits do not substantially exceed benefits provided by private sector employers, however. Eighty-six percent of workers employed by companies with 100 or more employees have paid vacation (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2008b). The average vacation time provided by large employers ranges from 11 days per year for workers with one year of job tenure to 22 days per year for workers with 20 years of job tenure (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2008c). In addition to paid vacation, 50 percent of employees in large companies have paid personal days, a benefit not provided to federal employees (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2008b).

The majority of the most competitive private-sector companies offer paid parental leave as part of a comprehensive benefit package. In 2008, the Joint Economic Committee surveyed Fortune 100 companies and found that nearly three-quarters (74 percent) of the responding companies offered a specific paid parental leave program to new mothers, with the median length of leave being six to eight weeks (Joint Economic Committee Majority Staff 2008). The length of paid leave offered to fathers was typically less, averaging approximately two weeks, with one-third (32 percent) of Fortune 100 companies offering paid parental leave for fathers. Forty percent of the responding companies offered more unpaid leave time than that required by the Family and Medical Leave Act in addition to paid leave.

A quarter of the Fortune 100 companies appear on *Working Mother* magazine's list of "100 Best Companies for Working Mothers" (Joint Economic Committee Majority Staff 2008). All the *Working Mother* 100 Best Companies offer paid maternity leave. Leave benefits among the "100 Best Companies for Working Mothers" range from fully or partially paid leave before and after the birth or adoption of a child to options for telecommuting, flextime, and part-time phase-back scheduling following a period of leave. Some companies offer as many as 18 weeks of paid leave to mothers.

Most companies offer four or more weeks of paid maternity leave, and 75 percent of the 100 Best offer paid paternity leave to fathers. The top 10 companies offer an average of 4 weeks of paid paternity leave and 32 additional weeks of job-guaranteed unpaid leave (Best 100 Companies for Working Mothers 2008).

Paid parental leave, as part of a comprehensive benefits package, is one way that private sector employers distinguish themselves in competition for employees. According to an article in *Compensation and Benefits Review*, work-life balance is a "particularly fertile area for companies to differentiate themselves" to attract new employees and improve employee retention. It reduces the pressure on employers to invert pay (offering new employees higher salaries than those who have worked with the company for years) and attracts employees based on a broad benefits package rather than primarily on a high salary (McNatt, Glassman, and McAfee 2007). Employers who offer a wider range of benefits often report doing so for the bottom-line impact obtained through improved recruitment and retention (Pickering 2002).

Existing Federal Benefits Don't Meet the Needs of New Parents

Though existing federal leave benefits may be adequate for many workers, these benefits may be insufficient to meet workers' needs in connection with pregnancy, childbirth, or the demands of the adoption process. In addition to using paid sick days and paid vacation time for the same purposes as other workers (e.g. illness, family emergencies, or vacation), pregnant women must visit the doctor frequently. In developed countries, women typically make between 8 and 11 doctor visits during pregnancy (Institute for Clinical Systems Improvement 2008). In addition, the American Academy of Pediatrics (2008) recommends seven medical check-ups in a baby's first year of life, with three in the first month. These routine doctor visits, along with any complications from birth or infant health problems, can require both mothers and fathers to take leave from work.

Complications resulting from birth can further deplete accrued sick leave—studies have shown that complications can continue for several weeks after the birth of a child. In particular, women who give birth by cesarean section may not be fully recovered from surgery for at least five weeks, and caring for a newborn reduces the ability of the mother to rest and recuperate (McGovern et al. 2006). Because it provides more time for the mother to recover from childbirth, paid parental leave is likely to have positive, long-term impacts on both physical (McGovern et al. 1997) and mental (Hyde et al. 1995) maternal health.

The limitations of existing paid leave for federal employees typically will be most noticeable for younger employees. While older federal workers with more job tenure have more accrued paid sick leave and more yearly paid vacation time, younger employees are the ones most likely to have children and need leave—the mean age for first births in the United States is 25 (Martin et al. 2009).

Table 1 shows the sources and likely uses of paid leave for a current federal employee trying to accumulate twelve weeks of paid parental leave to use during FMLA-guaranteed leave time. Assuming an employee takes only 2 weeks of annual vacation leave per year and utilizes only 3 sick days per year, that federal employee will accumulate 13 days of paid leave per year for the first 3 years he or she is employed by the federal government (this increases to 20 days per year for the next 12 years.)

Accruing 12 weeks of paid leave for use under FMLA would take more than four years from an employee's date of hire. This calculation does not, however, account for the use of sick leave for personal or family illness beyond the average use of three days (IWPR analysis of the 2007 National Health Interview Survey), the use of sick leave to address complications that may occur during pregnancy, or the use of sick leave to address infant health problems that may occur after birth, adoption, or foster placement. Any of these eventualities could substantially reduce the amount of paid leave available for new parents. In the event of an unplanned pregnancy, an unexpectedly quick adoption process, or a sudden foster placement, parents may be left with very little paid leave for parental leave and may need to take unpaid leave or return to work after only a short period of time.

Table 1. Current Sources and Likely Uses of Leave for a Federal Employee Attempting to Accrue Twelve-Weeks of Paid FMLA Leave

Leave Needed	Number of Days
Twelve weeks parental leave	60 days
Prenatal doctor visits	Equivalent of 2 days
Well child checkups	Equivalent of 1 day
<i>Total Leave Need:</i>	<i>63 days</i>
Sources of Paid Leave	Amount
Annual (vacation) leave	13 days per year for first 3 years, then 20 days per year
Assumed vacation use	Average use of 10 days per year
Annual sick leave	13 days per year
Assumed sick leave use	Average use of 3 days per year
<i>Annual Leave Accrual:</i>	<i>13 days accrued per year for first three years, then 20 per year</i>
Unforeseen Needs for Paid Leave	Amount
Pregnancy complications	Unpredictable
Other personal or family illness	Unpredictable
New child's medical needs	Unpredictable
<i>Approximate time to accrue leave:</i>	<i>4.2 years, barring unforeseen leave needs</i>

Sources: U.S. Office of Personnel Management; Institute for Clinical Systems Improvement; American Academy of Pediatrics; Institute for Women's Policy Research analysis of 2007 National Health Interview Survey data.

Returning to work soon after birth or adoption may not be a realistic option for many employees, not only because of complications that may necessitate rest and recuperation for several weeks, but also because of difficulty finding outside care for young infants. Most child care centers do not accept young infants. Of the 27 child care centers for federal employees administered by the General Services Administration in the National Capital Region (the District of Columbia and surrounding counties in Maryland and Virginia), none accept infants under six weeks of age. The average age at which infants are eligible for care is nine weeks, but more than one-third of these centers do not accept children less than three months of age (U.S. General Services Administration 2009). Hiring a nanny or other private, in-home source of care for this period may be prohibitively expensive for many families.

Given the high cost of having a child—estimated at \$11,000 in a child's first year of life (Lino 2008)—federal workers without enough accrued paid leave will be placed in a difficult financial position. Returning to work soon after birth or adoption may be an option for those with family members who can care for their children, but for those who lack access to caregivers able and willing to work at low cost or for free, arrangements may be difficult to make. Taking unpaid leave can deprive families of urgently needed funds at the moment costs are highest, and quality private child care options are scarce and expensive (California Child Care Resource and Referral Network 2007). New parents without adequate paid leave may find it simpler to leave the workforce temporarily or may find private sector work alternatives more conducive to balancing work and family roles.

Workers with Paid Leave are More Attached to their Employers

Research has shown that workers—especially new mothers—with paid leave are more likely to remain with their employers than employees who lack paid leave, resulting in reduced employee turnover and lower replacement costs. Independent of their feelings of loyalty or attachment to their employer, employees about to have a child must make opportunity cost decisions when considering what type of leave, if any, to take, and whether it is cost effective to return to work. Having a child means that working brings with it an additional cost—that of child care.

A report from the U.S. Census Bureau found that the type of leave arrangements available to women after the birth of a child is a factor in their decision to continue working. Analysis of a sample of women whose first birth occurred between 2000 and 2002 revealed that 44 percent of women with some form of leave returned to the workforce within three months of giving birth, compared to 23 percent of women without leave (Johnson 2008). Another U.S. Census Bureau report found that women with *paid* leave are more likely to return to the same employer than those with *unpaid* leave, indicating that receiving pay during leave is a key factor contributing to the ability and motivation of women to remain with the same employer (Smith, Downs, and O’Connell 2001).

Longer leaves have been found to significantly decrease job attrition in a random sample of employed pregnant women in the United States (Glass and Riley 1998), a finding replicated in cross-national studies (Waldfoegel, Higuchi, and Abe 1999). When Aetna increased the length of its maternity leave, the proportion of new mothers returning to work after having a baby increased from 77 percent to 91 percent (Institute for a Competitive Workforce 2008). When paid leave policies are in place, women who might have otherwise chosen to quit are more likely to continue working, partly because the overall cost of continuing to work decreases, since the cost of child care is reduced (Joesch 1997).

There is substantial evidence that organizational commitment to helping employees balance the demands of work and family has positive effects for employers and employees. Corporate surveys show that greater attention to workplace flexibility substantially improves workers’ commitment to their employer (Corporate Voices for Working Families 2005). Flexible workplace policies are strongly associated with higher levels of job satisfaction among employees with family commitments (Scandura and Lankau 1997). Workplaces that implement flexible working arrangements also see positive effects on productivity and morale—in one survey, high-performance employees at a technology company ranked flexibility second only to compensation in their decision to remain with the company (Rodgers 1992).

Despite the efforts of the federal government to help its employees balance work and family, results from the 2008 Federal Human Capital Survey show that federal workers are not satisfied with the work-life benefits provided to them. Compared to satisfaction with insurance benefits, paid vacation, and paid sick leave, federal employees are substantially less satisfied with child care subsidies, work-life program offerings, telecommuting, and alternative work schedules. Satisfaction with these benefits averages only 43.4 percent², while satisfaction with currently-provided paid leave—vacation and sick time—stands at 86.0 percent (U.S. Office of Personnel Management 2008b). Paid parental leave may help bridge the gap between high levels of satisfaction with currently offered paid leave and low levels of satisfaction with the work/family and workplace flexibility programs offered to federal workers.

Reducing Turnover Can Save the Federal Government Money

Though providing paid parental leave for federal employees will clearly require additional government expenditures, IWPR estimates show that the program would yield substantial economic and organizational benefits to the federal government. The Congressional Budget Office (2008) estimates that the average benefit payment for maternity leave under FEPLA would range from \$2,600 to \$5,100, depending on a worker’s earnings; for paternity leave, the range would be \$2,800 to \$5,800, for those taking the full four weeks of leave.

² Satisfaction is calculated by dividing the number of ‘satisfied’ and ‘very satisfied’ responses by the total responses among those workers with a basis to judge the benefit. For instance, only 9.1 percent of federal employees were satisfied or very satisfied with child care subsidies, but 63.7 percent said they had no basis on which to judge. This was recorded as a satisfaction rate of 25.1 percent – 9.1 percent divided by the 36.3 percent who offered a response for that survey item.

Improved employee retention would yield substantial government savings by reducing the costs associated with staff turnover. Recruiting new employees, the relatively low productivity of new hires, drains on the productivity of colleagues and supervisors, human resources processing time, training, and lost productivity between the departure of an employee and the hiring of a replacement are all real costs to employers (Phillips 1990). Providing paid parental leave helps to reduce these costs by improving retention of employees that might otherwise choose to leave the workforce either temporarily or permanently.

Calculating a dollar value for turnover costs is complex, but numerous studies have generated turnover cost estimates. Turnover costs vary widely across fields and job positions, with higher costs to replace employees who are highly educated or hold positions requiring specialized knowledge. One study conducted in the 1990s estimated that costs of turnover for hotel workers, for example, ranged from \$1,300 to replace a line cook to \$7,700 to restaff an administrative assistant position (Hinkin and Tracey 2000). Turnover costs for public school teachers vary by district between \$4,400 to \$18,000 per teacher (Barnes, Crowe, and Schaefer 2007). Appelbaum and Milkman (2006) found the cost of turnover varied widely among professionals, with costs of \$8,500 to \$13,000 to replace a financial professional and costs of \$80,000 to \$90,000 to replace senior managers at a construction company.

IWPR analysis of government data suggests that paid parental leave would improve retention, especially for female employees, since women still tend to bear most of the caregiving responsibility within families. IWPR analyzed data from the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (2009b) on the number of federal employees quitting federal service in 2008 to determine the relative departure rates for men and women. The data show that women of childbearing age were substantially more likely to leave federal employment than were men of the same age. Whereas 5.8 percent of men under age 49 employed by the federal government voluntarily quit in 2008, 7.6 percent of women in the same age group did so—a relative difference of 31 percent between women and men. Among employees age 50 and over, however, the difference is small, with a quit rate of 1.6 percent for men and 1.7 percent for women, a relative difference of only 5 percent. For example, if women of childbearing age had quit at a rate only 5 percent higher than men of the same age, the federal government would have retained an additional 8,000 employees in 2008.

Providing paid parental leave would almost certainly narrow the gap between male and female retention rates among federal employees. An additional IWPR analysis (Table 2) estimates the possible reduction in turnover costs to the federal government associated with reducing the departure of female employees of childbearing age by providing paid parental leave.³

Using national fertility data and OPM employment data, IWPR estimates that women employed by the civilian federal government give birth to about 19,000 children per year. Average per-employee turnover costs were estimated at between \$4,500 and \$25,000—with consideration of the comparability of position types between federal positions and those for which costs were estimated in the turnover studies mentioned above (Hinkin and Tracey 2000; Barnes, Crowe, and Schaefer 2007; Appelbaum and Milkman 2006). Estimated turnover costs are higher for older employees, whose employee pay grade and salary are higher. It was assumed that providing paid parental leave would result in a 14 percent reduction in turnover, equivalent to that experienced by Aetna when it increased the length of its existing maternity leave (see above). IWPR estimates that the federal government would save more than \$50 million per year by preventing the departure of 2,650 women of childbearing age. This number represents a potential savings associated with a reduction of only one-third in the relative difference between departure rates for federally employed men and women of childbearing age.

³ Due both to the higher quit rate among women and to the inapplicability of existing data to the departure of male employees, the benefits of reduced turnover are calculated only for female employees.

Table 2. Annual Turnover Savings from Reducing the Departure of Female Federal Employees of Childbearing Age by Offering Paid Parental Leave

Age Range (1)	Female Federal Employees ^a (2)	Adjusted Birth Rate ^b (3)	Annual Births (4)	Average Salary ^c (5)	Turnover Cost as Percent of Salary ^d (6)	Turnover Cost per Departure (7)	Departures Prevented ^e (8)	Turnovers Savings (9)
<20	4,016	20.6	83	\$23,408	20%	\$4,682	12	\$54,000
20-24	28,594	72.1	2,062	\$34,345	25%	\$8,586	289	\$2,479,000
25-29	62,002	91.9	5,698	\$53,006	30%	\$15,902	798	\$12,685,000
30-34	70,111	79.7	5,588	\$58,855	35%	\$20,599	782	\$16,116,000
35-39	87,413	43.2	3,777	\$60,554	40%	\$24,221	529	\$12,809,000
40-44	113,932	11.7	1,335	\$61,350	40%	\$24,540	187	\$4,588,000
45-49	145,426	3.0	443	\$61,402	40%	\$24,561	62	\$1,524,000
Totals:	511,494		18,987				2,658	\$50,255,000

^a U.S. Office of Personnel Management: FedScope Federal Human Resources Data for 2008.

^b Birth rates by age range are adjusted by IWPR according to the national fertility rate for employed women (42.9 births per 1,000 women) relative to the overall national rate (54.9 births per 1,000 women). Source: United States Census Bureau, Fertility of American Women: 2006 (Dye, 2008).

^c U.S. Office of Personnel Management: FedScope Federal Human Resources Data for 2008. OPM data specifies only employee pay grade information; salaries correspond to step 2 of federal pay grades.

^d Estimated by IWPR based on comparability of federal positions with existing turnover cost estimates; see page 9.

^e Based on a 14 percent reduction in turnover among employees giving birth as experienced by Aetna (Institute for a Competitive Workforce 2008), multiplied by column 4.

Column 4 is calculated by multiplying columns 2 and 3, and divided by 1,000. Column 7 is calculated by multiplying columns 5 and 6. Column 9 is calculated by multiplying columns 7 and 9.

In addition to reducing turnover among female employees, a paid parental leave program for federal employees could also yield health benefits for employees and their children and would be likely to reduce male employee turnover as well. Men are now more likely than ever to express interest in balancing work and family concerns (Galinsky, Aumann, and Bond 2009), suggesting that paid parental leaves could help recruit and retain male workers. There is also a substantial body of evidence suggesting that longer parental leaves are associated with a variety of benefits for mothers and families, including improved physical and mental health among new mothers (McGovern et al. 1997; Hyde et al. 1995), extended duration of breastfeeding⁴ (Lindberg 1996), reduced infant mortality (Ruhm 2000; Tanaka 2005), and improved child health and development (Bronte-Tinkew et al. 2008; Clark et al. 1997; Waldfogel, Han, and Brooks-Gunn 2002). These effects would have likely benefits for the federal government in the form of reduced absenteeism and improved productivity among those employees who benefit from longer leaves.

The Private Sector Is Moving Fast

The federal government has implemented many policies designed to help its workers attain a healthy balance between work and family obligations, but its reputation as a leader in helping employees balance work and family concerns is at risk. The private sector increasingly recognizes work-life policies as a strategic business tool to improve productivity, increase profits, and reduce costs. The 2008 report,

⁴ Longer duration of breastfeeding is associated with improvements in outcomes for children and mothers. Breastfeeding contributes to improved immune functioning, possible reductions in adverse conditions in infants, and more rapid recovery from pregnancy for mothers (American Academy of Pediatrics 2005).

“Workplace Flexibility: Employers Respond to the Changing Workforce,” produced by an affiliate of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, reports that both small and large employers are making improvements in workplace flexibility and paid leave policies in order to recruit and retain workers and improve their bottom line (Institute for a Competitive Workforce 2008).

The average federal worker is older and better educated than workers in the private sector. As federal workers begin to retire at a faster rate, the federal government will face an unprecedented challenge in competing with the private sector for qualified workers. Offering benefits that match or exceed those offered by the top private sector employers will help the federal government to attract and retain young, educated workers, reducing turnover costs and securing a productive, healthy workforce able to balance the demands of work and family.

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